

The University of Chicago

SOCIAL PROCESSES IN THE RISE OF
EARLY CHRISTIAN HERESIES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN CANDI-
DACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1934

By
RUSSEL BROWN SWENSEN

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PART II

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The history of human society seems to have been marked with the numerous attempts of minority groups to go against the main stream or the trends of the majority. Good and bad, noble and despicable, wise and foolish elements have been individually personified in such minority groups. The great majority of them, however, never perpetuated themselves to any extent, since they failed to meet as successfully as did the majority groups the needs of the social situations wherein they arose. Moreover, the powerful opposition of the majority often crushed them into conformity or oblivion.

The study of the social processes in the rise of early Christian heresies furnishes an example of unsuccessful minorities who failed to win in the great struggle of determining whether the Christian movement would eventuate in an established, authoritative institution or merely consist of some individualistic, loosely organized and relatively unstable religious societies.

Heresy as typified in these minority groups was not a problem of mere intellectual dissent from accepted views so much as it was the social expression of diverse interests of Christians within the movement. These included the racial, economic, class, cultural, and religious interests, as well as the intellectual ones, of the members. The function performed by the last was primarily that of furnishing a rationale for the others. Thus high-sounding theologies and cosmologies were produced to justify, validate, and explain the social and religious peculiarities inherent in the life experiences of the dissenting groups.

There must, however, be an occasion for those divergent interests to crystallize into opposite competing groups. There is often the presence of such differences within many large social bodies without sectarian developments. But when there is a steady growth of active competition among these differentiating interests, it eventually leads to distinctly segregated groups at variance with each other. This is especially true when a social

crisis or transitional period occurs which rather suddenly demands new and immediate solutions to perplexing problems. Likewise, the growing pressure of an authoritative control will often effect the crystallization of opposite interests into reactionary sectarian bodies. In the second century of our era all of these factors played an important part in the rise of Christian heresies. But the one which seemed to be pre-eminent was that which related to the problem of making new adjustments in a difficult period of transition.

Thus while Christianity was making its adolescent adjustment from a youthful, spontaneous apocalyptic movement to one that was more mature, more firmly established, and more at home in the world, there was a sharp struggle between the individualistic and institutional interests to determine the way that this should take place. These conflicting tendencies incorporated themselves in the form of contemporary social patterns. On the one hand there was that of the individualistic, small religious association, as typified in the mystery cult, philosophical school, or trade guild. On the other hand, there was the pattern of the imperialistic institutionalism embodied in the empire itself.

Therefore, because of the basically social nature of heresies the form of social organization in which the heretics grouped themselves has been a primary factor in classifying and studying them. Equally important have been the dominant interests, social and religious, which they exhibited--such, for example, as racial and provincial loyalties; zeal for moral reform; an inclination toward a highly emotional, sensuous, or realistic religious experience; and a penchant for an intellectual, refined mysticism. These interests and the social forms in which they crystallized became personified respectively in the Jewish Christians, the Montanists, the Marcionites, the sacramental and the intellectual Gnostic sectarians. In the light of information thus gained the sectarian tendencies may be seen as they are reflected in the New Testament itself.

Inasmuch as heresy is primarily a social phenomenon, the important factors in the social and religious situation confronting the early Christians deserve primary attention. Herein are seen elements which furthered individualistic, redemptive religious attitudes, which in a high degree were characteristic of the sects. These arose in an age of extreme cosmopolitan individualism, which followed as a consequence of the breakdown of the national barriers of the city states and the resulting syncretism of the old national religions of the Graeco-Roman world. The rapid growth of large imperial commercial cities with the migrations and mingling of many nationalities created serious problems of social

and religious stability. There followed a breakdown of old social and religious mores, while the lot of the masses became more wretched in spite of the outward splendor which benefited but the few. The healthy creative objectivity and social solidarity riveted around loyalty to the city state were succeeded by attitudes of frustration, of futility, and of pessimism and a morbid sense of sin. An escape from these was sought in mystical contemplation, asceticism, astrology, magic, and the sacramental religion of the mystery cults.

In the Christian movement itself a number of factors played a vital role in sectarian developments. There was a rapid increase of many Gentile converts with a wide variety of religious attitudes and backgrounds typifying different social, intellectual, cultural, and economic levels besides sectional and nationalistic differences. These naturally tended toward the formation of social groups along much the same lines. Then too the form of social organization, similar to the individual collegia, that characterized the early Christian communities and to an even greater extent the pagan guild associations became extremely popular and powerful in the second century. This social form of association became a most popular one among the lower and middle classes where early Christianity secured the bulk of its members. Thus in it the highly individualistic and eccentric religious features of the sectaries found a most congenial and popular social form. And in this form the sects competed vigorously with, and reacted against, the rising imperialistic control of the growing Catholic church.

The importance of the institutional development of early Christianity in its relation to, and influence upon, heresies was very marked. It constituted a competing and opposing type of social, religious trend from that just described. Its rise is seen in the growth of Christian literature for the purposes of cult control--such as the Gospels indicate--and in the early stress upon cult officials and obedience to them. It was greatly facilitated by the receding prominence of the Christian apocalyptic hope, as Christianity sought to establish, consolidate, and perpetuate itself in the world about it as an enduring movement. Yet the influence of apocalypticism is seen in its consciousness of being a distinctive remnant of spiritual Israel, which gave an exclusive self-consciousness to the Christians and made them all the more desirous to oppose the competing religions and to consolidate their members into a more complete solidarity. This intolerant attitude naturally led to opposition and finally to imperial persecution, which again helped to strengthen the institutional efficiency in withstanding this outward disintegrating pressure.

Most pertinent of all to this study were the competition and controlling efforts which the institutional interests exercised against the rapidly developing sectarian tendencies of the second century. This resulted in the firm establishment of the Catholic church institution, with an authorization of important ecclesiastical instruments of control, such as a body of officials tracing their authority to the early apostles, the New Testament canon, and the Apostles' Creed.

In its efforts to master the sectarians it revealed a remarkable practical insight into crowd and individual psychology, using as it did techniques and methods that played upon the deepest emotions and prejudices of the Christian masses. Thus they used scurrilous epithets, nicknames, and contagious polemical slogans against them. The opponents were held up to public gaze in the most ridiculous light imaginable. Their asceticism, intellectualism, rhetoric, and individual peculiarities were characterized as irreligious, most fantastically bizarre, and empty. Also such charges as lapsing in times of persecution, immoral behavior, and greedy graft were hurled at them. While their loose, individualistic and uniquely varying cult organizations, with their recent origin and their lack of unity and of apostolic connections, were held up to scorn in the light of the growing might and unity of the Catholic institution, which was represented as being solidly founded upon apostolic succession with apostolic officials (i.e., the bishops). Apostolic writings of the New Testament were set forth against the religious literature of the sects. The heretic doctrines were depicted as being most inimical to the sacraments and to the historical traditions of Christianity. As a final weapon against them the orthodox believers were ordered to hold no social relations with them whatsoever, to avoid any tendencies to speculate or to argue about theological matters. While the church fathers in the last stages of sectarian controversy did become more proficient in attempting to refute and controvert the heretics on an intellectual plane by special refutations, yet even here the appeals to emotion, slander, and ridicule were frequently present.

The Jewish Christians exhibit the one extreme of a conservative national sectional group which became a sect through their failure to adapt themselves to the popular trends of the Graeco-Roman world relative to religious interests. At the other pole are to be seen the Gnostics, who went to an extreme in adopting popular features.

Hence the earliest advocates of the Christian cause--the early Jewish believers--eventually found themselves outside the

fold of orthodox Christianity. Their meager following was accounted a heretical sect by both Jews and Christians. This resulted from the rapid spread of Christianity among Gentile believers who typified radical differences in culture, religious attitudes and experience, cosmopolitan outlook, and racial characteristics. The early Jewish believers could not rid themselves of the thought that first and foremost they were Jews. Their religion as they saw it was simply Judaism with Jesus for a Messiah. Their differences with Gentile Christians became sharply acute when a clash occurred in the time of Paul as to whether Gentile converts should be made members of the Jewish race. The issues then raised were never resolved. Also, Jews were unpopular the world over for the racial and religious exclusiveness they manifested and for the bloody revolts of 70 and 135 A.D. Then too, this group of Jewish believers remained geographically isolated from the Hellenistic Christians. Especially was this true after the fall of Jerusalem, when they withdrew to the regions of Trans-Jordan and the Dead Sea. Here they maintained themselves for a few centuries before finally disappearing.

The fragments of their literature, which apparently survive in the Pseudo-Clementines, exhibit how Jewish this group remained, thus quite out of line with the religious way of other Christians. Their belief in God was highly monotheistic. Jesus' mission, in which he sought to reform the Law of Moses, was purely messianic and prophetic. The Law of Moses was looked upon as divine, requiring for its perfection the removal of but a few extraneous elements. Then too, these people were ardent millennialists.

They maintained such Jewish customs of life and religious practice as circumcision, frequent lustrations, and abstinence from social and table fellowship with non-baptized people. They were against asceticism, demonology, and magic, and held up a type of salvation which was much like the attainment pattern so treasured by Judaism. The great stress was thus not primarily upon an inward religion but rather upon one of ethical acts. A strict retributive type of divine justice was adhered to in their belief. They developed a simple cult life patterned after the Jewish synagogue assembly, with the stress being laid upon James, the brother of Jesus, as the first great leader of their movement after Jesus. For scripture they probably had the Gospel according to the Hebrews.

Thus the above group or sect yields a typical example of how racial, sectional, rural, and cultural differences, combined with certain crises and conflicts, segregated the descendants of

the original believers in Jesus from their Gentile brethren. Of primary importance was their inability to shake off their racial and sectional distinctiveness in adapting themselves to an evolving and growing Christian movement. By following the ways of religious living of their fathers in their theological, ethical, and devotional implications, they maintained a type of religious temperament quite different from that of the majority of Hellenistic Christians.

The Montanist heresy was partly conditioned by similar causes, which brought forth the Ebionite heresy. It arose in a region geographically quite isolated--in the Phrygian rural hinterland--among a highly emotional, simple people. Here the nationalistic emphases were more pronounced in their attitudes. This feature, combined with the spiritistism and rigoristic interests of these people, constituted a problem for the expanding imperial control of the Catholic party.

The movement began as an outbreak of fervent nationalist apocalypticism, marked by abundant spiritistic prophecies and predictions of its leaders. That the founder, Montanus, was an ex-priest of Cybele is significant in explaining the great emotionalism inherent in this movement.

In the rapid spread of the movement over the empire the spiritistic and rigorist aspects predominated over its original nationalist emphasis. The situations then facing the empire and Christians help to explain the growth of this sect. It sprang forth with an answer to the crying needs of the period. At this time, in the latter half of the second century, especially in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the empire was afflicted by barbarian invasions, plagues, and famine. Likewise the persecution situations were equally serious for the Christians. In such times of almost cosmic calamity the unbelievers were easily made to believe that the "atheist" Christians were the cause of their misfortunes. Then too, there were the growing latitudinarianism of the church and a dearth of emotionalism in its religion which were instrumental factors in calling forth the strong, reforming, spiritistic aspects of the Montanists. That many others felt a similar dislike of the way things were tending in the Church, and agreed with the Montanist stress on spiritism, is evident from the spread and degree of popularity the sect enjoyed for a time. Thus it spread even to North Africa, where it secured its most famous convert, Tertullian.

Their theological beliefs and sacraments differed little if any from those of the Catholics. After its rapid rise and spread the movement eventually consolidated into a comparatively stable form of organization. Simple in form and number of offi-

cials, yet it was apparently quite effective. The preserved written oracles of their original prophetic leaders were used as a sort of sacred scripture, along with the Old and New Testaments. Doubtless the worship service at first was highly ecstatic. But by the time of Tertullian it had become so regulated that spiritistic phenomena, though still highly prized, were not allowed as part of the main service.

In their manner of conduct they became famous for their moral rigor and devotion to martyrdom. The latter especially was valuable in recommending them to their fellow Christians. But their sharp attacks on the lenient Catholic moral legislation, their castigation in a most violent manner of those who lapsed or who were unduly cautious in times of persecution, were contributory factors in turning the masses away from them. Thus their failure to become a lasting and permanent movement may be attributed to the fact that they set a standard of conduct too high for the majority of Christian believers. This element outweighed the importance of the more popular features which they displayed, namely, their warm emotionalism and spiritism.

In Montanism, then, is revealed a clear case of a resurgence of a spiritistic type of religious experience and a reform movement which arose out of a highly provincial rural setting, where sectional and nationalistic elements were potent forces. It exhibited a rebellion against the growing might of a rapidly developing institution which sought to bring all individualistic types of religious behavior under its control.

The Marcionite heresy, beginning at the middle of the second century, presented a striking picture of an unusually powerful religious leader, Marcion. He fashioned a strong church organization upon the authority of a new canon of Christian scripture interpreted in an extreme Pauline fashion. In his institutional use of scripture he might well be called the first Protestant, as indeed Harnack designates him. Through this man's genius as an organizer and the fervent spirit of his followers, the sect became the most powerful opponent of the rising Catholic church in the second century.

The times were ripe for this movement. Against the materialism of the Antonine age there was a vigorous revival along ethical and ascetic lines, resulting no doubt from the activity of the Cynic-Stoic preachers. At this time, too, the rise of the collegia associations was most rapid. In literature, interest was becoming aroused concerning the pseudepigrapha and the interpolation of spurious matter into genuine works. The influence of the canon of Sibylline Oracles was still very strong at this period. These undoubtedly had a strong influence upon Marcion's desire to expurgate

the apostolic writings and gospels from alleged Jewish interpolations and to form them into a sacred Christian canon.

Marcionism was basically a reform movement, since by rejecting the Old Testament scriptures it sought to purge Christianity of all Jewish elements. It would also purify the Christian writings of their Jewish influence. A return was made to Paul as the authority upon whom to base Christian religious teaching or doctrine. It would stress a more inward type of religion--one of faith and love rather than of the more external, strictly retributive sort. It also sought to raise the increasingly lax standards of conduct that were coming to prevail since orthodox leaders had begun to set up a code of behavior well within the reach of the masses, though falling short of the ideal of the rigorist ethical virtuosos such as the Marcionites.

The religious attitudes of the movement were marked by intense fervor along the lines given, especially the ethical-ascetic features. Yet its teaching of a God of love, not a stern judge like the Old Testament God, must have been influential in gathering many adherents. The allusion to the sinners rather than the Jewish heroes of the Old Testament following Christ in the latter's sojourn in Hades might indicate the movement's success in rescuing gross sinners from their sordid ways. Yet the movement probably was composed chiefly of highly respectable Christians, as Tertullian admits. Though bitterly attacked by the Church fathers, the members of this sect were scarcely ever accused of lax moral behavior.

There was little of the deeply mystical or ecstatic charismata about the religious experience of the Marcionites. They had a deep-seated piety, as is revealed by their holding essentially a Pauline interpretation of salvation and defining God in terms of forgiving love. Thus they escaped the institutionally disintegrating effects of spiritism and avoided a more external legalistic evaluation of salvation.

The great strength of their movement lay in the powerful, inspirational character of their founder; in the simple, clear-cut, though somewhat dualistic, theology; in having their own clearly defined canon of scripture, with regular church officials; and in possessing church buildings. They also had a carefully supervised system of catechumenship. Yet withal there was considerable informality and freedom in the institution, with women taking a conspicuous part. The worship service was so like that of the Catholics that the ignorant Christians had to be warned lest they unwittingly attend the wrong church.

* Their literature was especially effective in controlling and instructing their members. The canon of scripture had along with it an Antitheses, a composition of Marcion's, wherein he

contrasted piece by piece the superior teachings of his new canon of scripture with the Old Testament. These two constituted an authoritative standard of religious thought and ethics that were of great influence in the movement.

Through their strong convictions the Marcionites became zealous missionaries, particularly among other Christians. This was natural, since their goal lay essentially in perfecting the Christian church. Little is known of this activity except that it resulted in the rapid spread of the movement throughout the empire. Even women played a part here. In this expansion other features certainly commended them to other Christians, such as the high quality of the Marcionite believers themselves and their reputation for strenuously maintaining a strict Christian aloofness from paganism, which resulted in their having many martyrs to boast of. Of importance also is the fact that the movement was essentially an urban one, showing an adaptability and capacity to adjust to the cities throughout the empire much more successfully than the Montanists did.

The relation of the Gnostic sects to the mystery religions is outstanding. Until recently only the intellectual and philosophical elements of Gnosticism have been stressed by scholars, little emphasis having been laid upon the basic relationship of the Gnostics to the mysteries, not only in the similarity of the type of redemptive religious experience but in sacramental and cult details.

The mysteries were the popular religions of the second century A.D. In meeting the feeling of pessimistic futility which engulfed numerous individuals in this era, the mysteries by means of ascetic preparation, sacramental ritual and its resulting mystical experience, mediated to the individual a satisfying realistic union with deity. This was supposed to result in divine immortality for the initiate, rendering him victorious over destiny. Magic was also extensively used by these cults in a highly effective manner in that superstitious age.

The mysteries also showed an interest in depicting their cult theology in the form of nature myths, which in time took on cosmic significance in their scope and interpretation. In the syncretistic tendencies of the period there occurred a fusion or theocrasia of these mythologies with a considerable degree of allegorical speculation in reading deep philosophical and religious concepts into them. Furthermore, the Oriental mysteries were most abundant and influential in the very regions where Gnosticism had its rise. In fact, many of them were native to the regions of Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor where Gnosticism existed.

From the beginning Christianity had intimate contact and competition with the mysteries. Many of its early Gentile converts had been mystery cult initiates. They frequently typified the attitudes of the mysteries in their manner of emotional religious experience and yearning for realistic, sacramental ritual.

The early Gnostics typified such popular interests. They represented not a sudden outburst but the culmination of tendencies inherent in Christianity from the time it attracted Gentile converts. They were characterized primarily by seeking in an extreme fashion to interpret Christianity in the popular mystery cult patterns of the day. And they were interested above all in the problem of redemption from the evils of this life.

In explaining and justifying their religious experience they were led to much speculative interpretation similar to that of the followers of the more intellectual mysteries, who gave a cosmic universal content and significance to their religious experience. In their method of redemption they typified extreme otherworldly attitudes, from their ascetic tendencies to their profound mysticism. Like the adherents of the mysteries they were highly individualistic and syncretistic, and consequently failed to achieve powerful organized religious bodies like the Catholics or the Marcionites.

Their characteristic theological and religious features included a thoroughgoing dualism both in ethics and cosmology. This often led to a dualistic or adoptionist Christology. Also, as a consequence of this dualism, there was a denial of such basic Christian institutions and concepts as the Old Testament, apocalypticism, resurrection, and the final judgment. There was an important stress laid upon a mystery cult technique in mediating redemption. This was accompanied by a somewhat speculative mysticism, though the latter feature was predominantly a characteristic of the intellectual Gnostic sects. Much emphasis was placed upon predestination, as only a few were to be saved. Asceticism, and occasionally libertinism, were quite characteristic.

The Gnostics seem to typify in general two basic interests: the redemptive and sacramental on the one hand, the more intellectual on the other. Most sects of the Gnostics typify in a more or less definite way a preponderance of one or the other of these interests. That the "mystery cult" type of Gnostic sect early appeared is indicated from the fact that the earliest references to the Gnostics prove that this type appeared first. They were given somewhat nebulous names such as Ophites, Simonians, etc. The fact that they indulged in magical practices to a high degree (especially the Simonians) is significant of their mystery cult relationships. Irenaeus says that Valentinus, the great philosophical

Gnostic, used the ideas of the Ophites as a framework for his own. Also, the early Christians had few members who could qualify for the philosophical profession until a comparatively late date in the second century. But on the other hand there were many ex-initiates of the mysteries in the Christian fold from the time of its spread in the Gentile world. The early Christians had far closer contact in their daily life with Oriental mysteries than with the intellectual philosophers of the speculative type. Their associations with philosophers were largely with the rough Cynic-Stoic type, who was quite a different sort of person. The earlier Gnostics show fewer traces of Christian thought than do the later intellectual ones. The latter reveal a later date by their attempt to approximate many of their views to a rather developed form of Christianity. Whereas in the case of the earlier Gnostics there is little attempt in this direction, inasmuch as a crystallized norm of Christian thought or institutions had not been achieved. Thus we see distinct tendencies of this in the epistle to the Colossians. Here there seems to have been quite a radical deviation, which shocked Paul exceedingly. There seemed to be relatively little Christian content in this syncretistic movement, and the members of it were hardly conscious of any Christian norm from which they departed.

The religious experience of these mystery cult Gnostics shows that a highly emotional, sensuous, ecstatic type of person was being appealed to. In fact, some were distinctly abnormal in these respects, going to gross antinomian extremes. Their cult mysteries and rites were much like those of the Oriental mysteries. This is shown not only in their secrecy but in the preparation or catechumenship, their oath of secrecy and loyalty just before initiation, the initiatory baptism, the sealing, a mystic marriage with divine beings, the imparting of a secret gnosis of formulae, and signs or information about the occult astral world that would be useful in warding off astral demons after death when the soul was on its way up to Pleroma. There seems to have been a cult eucharist of regenerating power. Music and psalms with a sacred drama and dance were used by various cults in an effective way. In some Gnostic groups there were also allusions to different degrees or stages of initiation. This is especially noticeable in the Coptic Gnostic writings.

The phase of cult organization of these Gnostics that was given the most emphasis was the mysteries. The cult officials were mainly for this purpose. The individualism and free spiritism were not conducive to a Catholic institutional system but rather to small groups. The secret apostolic tradition for the source of the mysteries, instead of relating to the officials as

in the Catholic church, was concerned only with the rituals.

The literature of these Gnostics was twofold: the practical, which dealt with the cult mysteries and had occult diagrams and formulae; and the popular novels, of which we have a fair number preserved in the apocryphal New Testament literature, especially the uncanonical acts and gospels. The latter were extremely effective and popular, judging by the way the Catholics preserved them after modifying the Gnostic salient features. Along with the literature, in their propaganda and expansion much use was made of magic to astonish and overawe the masses.

The importance of Alexandria as the chief center for the rise of the intellectual Gnostics can hardly be overemphasized. Here was the center of the revival of the Neo-Platonic and Neo-Pythagorean mystical philosophies. Here too were the Hermetics, the mystery cult with an intellectual, mystical, non-sacramentarian way of salvation.

The tendency of the philosophical thought was like the popular religions--highly syncretistic. In the second century it was moving away from the Stoic and Epicurean materialistic concepts toward the more mystical outlook of the Platonic philosophy.

Philosophy stood in the highest favor in the second century, succeeding a period of some persecution and unpopularity in the first century. Since the role of the philosopher was so remunerative, especially in popular and social recognition (though occasionally in monetary return as well), the field at times was flooded with unworthy representatives. Yet there was a strong professional caste attitude among the philosophers. This was manifested in distinctive dress and behavior besides their intellectual attainments. Their social grouping was still according to the schools of classical Greece, with great loyalty still being professed for the school tradition. This was maintained even while loyalty to the original thought of the school founders was considerably watered by syncretistic tendencies. This social differentiation of philosophers into different groups was kept intensely alive by the keen rivalry still existing between the various schools.

Christianity was greatly affected by the influx of some philosophers as well as by increased numbers of cultured and wealthy members. These helped to create an upper cultural class apart from the masses. When not properly absorbed, such a group by its independent individuality and social prestige was often recalcitrant to ecclesiastical control. Besides, from them came the independent Christian schools such as existed at Alexandria, Caesarea, and Antioch, with their highly speculative interests. These people felt that Christianity should be clothed and interpreted with the attractive dress of contemporary "scientific" philosophical thought.

The school form of social organization or association was easiest for them to use in their gathering together for such purposes, and it gradually became a type for the sectarian organization when people of this class became heretical. Similarly the urge for highly mystical experience, such as characterized the intellectual religionists of the day, would segregate many of this class from their more realistic fellow believers, who depended so much on visible symbols. Their philosophic concern for high ethics and moral behavior also constituted criticism of the latitudinarian trends of the Catholic masses.

The rise of the Basilidian and Valentinian Gnostic sects occurred in Egypt. While both reflect philosophic features to a high degree, the Valentinians leaned more to the metaphysical phases and the Basilidians to the ethical ascetic interests. The Valentinians especially showed strong influences of Platonic thought in their system, notably in the abstract way in which aeons of Pleroma were conceived, making them essentially hypostases or attributes of God. The Basilidians bore greater resemblance to the Stoic pantheists--at least in one of their systems, though it was combined with some aspects of Platonism. There was considerable variety of thought among the Valentinians, showing the speculative and individualistic character of this social group to an extreme degree. Both sects exhibit a closer approximation to the more Christian type of thought than previous Gnostics. But their intellectualism went far beyond the understanding and comprehension of the average man, as the fathers testify.

Both sects had powerful intellectual founders and attracted followers of intellectual and cultural propensities. Some revealed a degree of reflective thought almost on a par with the founders. This was especially true among the Valentinians.

The metaphysical, mystical, and ethical emphases of these intellectual sectarians were set forth in accordance with the popular, elegant, literary and rhetorical arts then so much in vogue. The Valentinians were especially outstanding in this field, producing metaphysical treatises, allegorical commentaries, religious poetry, psalms and homilies. Fragments of their commentaries and critical exegetical treatises remain, which show their priority to the orthodox thinkers in the use of these literary devices.

The cult or social organization of these Gnostics was much like that of the philosophical school, as has been intimated. There were doubtless some mystery features, to be sure, since their philosophy was highly religious; but in the time of the great founders and their early disciples the cult seems to have had more the characteristics of a school. The religious interests were doubtless expressed in a similar way to those of the Hermetics or

the secret conventicles of Philo, emphasis being placed upon the mystical rather than the sacramental ways of approach.

Thus the above sects reveal to a high degree those features inherent in the philosophical schools while combining a strong religious mystical interest. They seemed to exemplify the mystical experience and social behavior characteristic of the Platonic, Neo-Pythagorean adherents of the second century. Accordingly they exhibited how social, intellectual, and cultural differences in the membership of the Christian believers were important factors in causing the rise of the philosophical Gnostic sects, especially when their highly speculative individualism ran counter to the ecclesiastical program.

In the light of the previous studies made of later developments of the sectarians, those heresies reflected within the New Testament writings are examined. The data in most cases are very meager; yet allusions and inferences point to a very real struggle with the rise of the sects, especially in the later books of the New Testament.

According to the letters of Paul no actual sectarian condition prevailed, since there had been no achievement of a definitely Christian standard by which to determine heterodoxy. But he reveals certain tendencies of individualism, spiritism, dualism, antinomianism, and asceticism, with speculative syncretistic and rhetorical features that constituted the basic elements in thought, religious attitudes and behavior of later Gnostic sects. Even in Paul's time these became serious problems in their extreme form and endangered the stability of his religious communities, as he shows in his letters to the Galatians, Corinthians, Romans, and Colossians. These indicate how such elements were not entirely new phenomena arising in the second century, but existed from the beginning of Gentile Christianity. Though greatly augmented in the second century by a rapid increase of Gentile members, they very early formed strongly competitive elements against the rising institutional tendencies. Most of the struggles with heresies in the second century occurred because of this rivalry.

The Gospel of Matthew has a few references that seem to reflect a further stage in this struggle between institution and "spiritism" in the Syrian church. Here the weight of Jesus' authority is brought to bear upon the migratory, somewhat predatory character of the exponents of a more fluid, spiritistic, prophetic type of Christianity. This is confirmed by the somewhat later picture in the Didache of the same situation.

Acts 20:29-30 reveals a similar situation to the one mentioned in Paul's letter to the Roman church (16:17-30). Both refer to the church at Ephesus. Acts presents a somewhat later

development, though of leaders actively enlisting followers. Whereas in Romans the picture deals mostly with those opposing Paul's teaching and introducing factions.

The Epistle to the Hebrews has only a short statement about the existence of some ascetic speculative sectarians, but much of its emphases in theological content and ways of behavior further suggest their threatening presence. Thus emphasis is placed upon God as being the creator, Jesus as being both extremely human and yet so divine as to be above all astral deities. The emphasis on his atoning death is stated in such a way as to oppose sectarian views regarding exclusive predestinarianism.

The Ephesian situation is further set forth in the Apocalypse of John, the Fourth Gospel, and the Johannine letters. These documents, together with the Epistle to the Ephesians, indicate a more acute sectarian problem in the region of Ephesus and West Asia Minor cities. The information about this situation is supplemented by the Ignatian letters, which relate to these Christian communities at about the same time as when the Johannine letters were written.

The Epistle to the Ephesians, like that to the Hebrews, gives Jesus divine superiority over all astral powers or deities. Special emphasis is given to love and unity and harmony among all Christians, which, combined with a specific reference to sectarian difficulties, were quite pertinent and reveal on the whole a fine irenical method of meeting the situation.

The Apocalypse of John shows a marked consciousness of sects, being the first to designate some of them by a definite name. They are characterized by a spiritistic, antinomian, syncretistic individualism, which in a period of impending persecution was most obnoxious to the author.

The Gospel of John, with its absence of direct allusions to sects, is most irenical in character, stressing love and unity among the believers even more emphatically than does Ephesians. There is likewise a playing upon Jesus' cosmic greatness and humanity, as if opposing aeonologies on the one hand and docetism on the other.

The Johannine letters exhibit a more objective picture of sectaries than do the previous books, though none are named as in the Apocalypse. Here their separatist tendencies are much more marked. The characteristics of spiritistic behavior, with possible tendencies toward antinomianism and syncretistic features, are similar to those in the Apocalypse. Docetism, which the Fourth Gospel seems to oppose, is explicitly fought here. The propaganda efforts of the sects seem to be especially effective, combined as they are with the attractive arts of the sophist.

It is difficult, however, because of the general character of these heretics, to identify them with any particular sect described in detail by the later fathers.

The Pastoral letters probably reflect a situation in West Asia Minor. They seem to have been written about the middle of the second century, as indicated by certain advanced ecclesiastical and heretical features. They depict two distinct types of heresies, possibly those of the Marcionites and the intellectual Gnostics, which were widespread at that time. Especially do the Marcionites seem to be opposed in these letters.

They reflect a more advanced ecclesiastical persecution and heretical situation than do the Johannines. The Christian community here has become secularized and institutionalized with a prosaic, more routinized way of life. Spiritism has vanished, being present neither among the heretics nor the orthodox. The bishop is the teacher, and truth is to be found in the scriptures. There is apparently a more complex group of Christians here, with real differences in their social and economic status.

The Marcionites seem to be pictured in this situation primarily because of a reference to the Antitheses of Marcion. In itself this would not be conclusive, but most of the characteristics of the heretics in the situation fit in with those peculiar to this sect. Thus the Old Testament is energetically upheld--most probably in the face of a Marcionite attack--when it is said that "all scripture is divinely inspired, and useful in teaching, in reproof, in correcting, etc."¹ Likewise, the reference to the wrangling about the Law must refer to the sharp attacks made upon it by the Marcionite Antitheses and the followers of the movement. There is also an absence of spiritistic features in the religious experience and behavior of these sectarians which was quite characteristic of the Marcionites. The asceticism of these people is emphatically stressed and held up as ungodly. Few sects became as rigorous or famous in this respect as the Marcionites. There is also manifested in these Pastoral sectarians a keen interest in moral reform. They are apparently outstanding in their zeal for salvaging those who had sinned greatly. Then, too, the references to the zealous sectarian propaganda activities fit in well with the Marcionite reputation for this. Women seem to have been prominent in the services and cult life of these people, which draws the stern admonition of the Pastoral author against such a custom. This is significant in view of the fact that the Marcionites were outstanding in the matter of the prominence played by women in their cult life.

¹II Tim. 3: 16.

The fact that Paul is used for an apostolic sanction by the author is significant. Thus he has the apostle favoring a strong institutionalized Christianity and makes him oppose these sects with great vehemence. Inasmuch as he was the patron saint of the Marcionites, what could be more fitting than to have Paul himself express views inimical to the sect with its highly dualistic beliefs and ascetic way of life?

By the middle of the second century Marcionism had spread widely over the empire, as Justin admits. In the cities of West Asia Minor there were intimate commercial and cultural contacts with Rome. There was also a proportionately large number of Christian believers as compared with other sections of the Mediterranean world. Thus because of the sectarian tendencies there, which are so often reflected in the New Testament documents, it is more than probable that the Marcionite sectarians found a foothold.

However, there are a few other features of this sectarian situation that scarcely fit the Marcionites. Inasmuch as the middle of the second century was the Blütezeit of heresies--especially the Gnostic and Marcionite ones--it is not surprising to find different sectarian tendencies in the populous Asia Minor cities with their large Christian membership.

The characteristics that are difficult to link up with the Marcionites fit in rather well with those of the intellectual Gnostics. Though no elaborate speculations are described in detail, there are allusions which point to them. Thus the reference to the endless genealogies in I Timothy probably indicates the abundant aeon speculations, with long lists of aeonic names which were so distinctive of the Valentinian Gnostics.

Furthermore, strong tendencies toward intellectual disputation seem to be manifesting themselves here. This is seen in the references to frequent intellectual disputations and controversies which these sectarians indulge in, even among themselves. Rhetorical skill is displayed in these disputations in a sophisticated manner which more nearly fits the intellectual sectarians than it does the simpler Marcionites.

In common with the Marcionites they had strong dualistic features in their beliefs and likewise were characterized by an absence of spiritistic behavior. Of course the above elements do not have anything so specific as the reference to the Antitheses, although the "endless genealogies" come close to this. It is an item which points to the Valentinian sect, since no others speculated so freely with aeonic names and details. The Valentinians, like the Marcionites, were a sect which spread widely in the second century. It is very likely that in the wealthy, cultured cities of Asia Minor numbers of these sectarians found congenial spirits

and a situation to their liking. However, on the whole the data are not ample nor specific enough to imply more than strong possibilities of the Valentinians being represented there.

Jude and II Peter reflect similar heretical situations, though the latter is somewhat later than the former. They show a more objective attitude toward heresies than that of the Pastorals. This is seen in the way harsh polemics were hurled at them, while their adherents were consigned to burning infernal regions. These books possibly record the situation from the middle of the second century to the end of the third quarter of the same century. II Peter seems to reflect a consciousness of the first New Testament canon.

The various antinomian and popular Gnostic features of the sects portrayed here suggest similarities with the Marcosian offshoot of the Valentinian sect. This is due not to a close relationship between them but to the fact that next to the Gnostics of the Coptic codices, we have the most complete account of the sacramental type of Gnostic cult in the references of Irenaeus and Hippolytus pertaining to the Marcosians. Since there are no such definite allusions to any of the characteristic features of this sect as that of the reference in the Pastorals to the Antitheses of Marcion, it is much more difficult to identify the heresies of Jude and II Peter. Several characteristics, however, indicate some suggestive similarities with the Marcosians. Both had a locale in Asia Minor. Marcus, the founder of the sect, was active for a time in Asia Minor before Irenaeus met his followers in Gaul. Antinomian, immoral tendencies are in both movements. There is likewise against them the accusation that they were greedy and used religion for gain. In their efforts to attract adherents they mingled quite freely with Christians in the latter's religious feasts, thus winning the confidence of the faithful. They exhibit similar types of emotional spiritism in their experience and expression of religious emotion. They use allegories to interpret the scripture in accordance with their own religious interests. They are arrogant, conceited, and insubordinate in their attitude to other Christians, especially to the church officials. Both groups indulged in magical practices and secret mysteries. The latter, especially, assured them of salvation and powerful demon-controlling formulae, so that they became extremely insolent and defiant to the world-ruling astral deities. Though the mysteries are not mentioned in Jude and II Peter, yet the attitude of insolent defiance seems to be a result of a mystery initiation.

There is also on neither side any inclination to profound thought or real intellectualism regarding speculative matters. The spiritistic emotionalism and antinomian sensuality, with the

emphasis upon redemption through ritual and magic, explain this lack of real intellectual interest.

Thus the facts point to some general essential similarities with the Marcosians. In identifying the above-mentioned sectarians we are handicapped, of course, by having no adequate account of other heresies of the period in Asia Minor. Christian authors of the two letters are very negligent in presenting with their anti-heretical polemic the religious and cult practices of their sectarian opponents.

The trends of heresies are thus seen to lie close to the problems of adjustment of a religious movement in a critical transition period, when complex social differences and various interests were not integrated into definitely established Christian ways of religious thought and practice. When the imperialistic social pattern, which was typified in the growing Christian institution, and the Hellenistic individualism, which was represented in the mystery cult type of association, competed strenuously for supremacy, it was inevitable that serious sectarian phenomena should arise. While the intellectual and cultural interests which sought to bring in Hellenistic philosophy to interpret Christianity as an up-to-date religion furthered the process. Thus sectarianism grew with increasing momentum throughout the greater part of the second century. The various sectaries exemplified in a striking way some of the divergent social and religious interests that were at variance with the rising standard of Christian orthodoxy. For the most part they typified that powerful urge, often prevalent within the human race, to stand up for independence and freedom even though it brought down upon them epithets of opprobrium, slander, and hate applied by those who represented the more dominant social trends.

